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Christian Concerns



in regard to

Food and Agriculture

COMMISSION OF THE CHURCHES
ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

A statement approved by the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs at the recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Food and Agriculture, at Willingen, Germany, July 22-24, 1952.

The Commission was established by the World Council of Churches, composed of 158 Protestant and Orthodox denominational bodies in forty-three countries with an approximate membership of 150 million, and by the International Missionary Council, composed of thirty-three national Christian councils and conferences.

THE interdependence of urban and rural people in modern industrialized society necessitates clear recognition of dependence upon the land as basic to human existence and social development. The Christian churches, therefore, welcome the attention now being devoted internationally to problems of food and agriculture and enunciate the following principles as relevant to Christian concerns in this area.

1. The Right Use and Conservation of Human Resources

The men and women who live on the land and who seek a livelihood from it matter most in a Christian view of agriculture. Their need for dignity and development of God-given potentialities, their need for genuine fellowship and community must have first place. Men in their vast majority live on the land and struggle for a livelihood from it. Ignorance, superstition, and technical backwardness all contribute to a tremendous waste of their resources. The grinding poverty of the lives of countless rural people is hostile to spiritual and moral development, to decent family life, and to good social relations. Exploitation of farmers and farm labour and unjust forms of land tenure are causing widespread misery.

To help men and women on the land to free themselves from economic and social shackles must be a primary objective of national and international agricultural programmes. Different action is required according to the conditions of different countries and regions:

- a. Safeguards for the social welfare of the individual, the family, and the community

should be made an integral part of plans for economic development.

- b. Just solutions should be sought for problems of land tenure and debt, to enhance personal initiative and responsibility, and to safeguard the family.
- c. Labour-saving technological processes should be made available wherever appropriate, together with the fundamental education required to undergird technical improvements as well as cultural advancement.
- d. Voluntary cooperation should be encouraged for fellowship and for more efficient production and more equitable distribution.
- e. Educational measures should be undertaken to raise the quality of family life and reduce the pressure of population.

2. The Right Use and Conservation of Natural Resources

God created the good earth for the service of this and future generations. The earth is the Lord's, and tillers of the soil are stewards whose rights are matched with responsibilities. The earth and the homesteads upon it should be hallowed by acts of dedication and thanksgiving. Good husbandry is a clear moral obligation, and the waste of created resources is a sin against our neighbour, against posterity, against the natural order, and against God. National and international agricultural policies need to keep two goals constantly in view:

- a. Vigorous measures should be taken to expand the production of essential foodstuffs, to increase both the quantity and quality of human nutrition, and to help provide for growing populations. This involves improvements under several categories: better seeds, better methods of culture, better use of marginal

lands, and a better division of labour through the international exchange of goods and services. It also requires moral and spiritual, as well as material, incentives to a new standard of living.

- b. Measures to increase production should be combined with an equally vigorous programme to conserve, reclaim, and improve the soil. The checking of erosion and soil depletion is a moral obligation to future generations and to God.

A complementary task in industrially advanced countries is the development of effective education on the moral obligation of consumers to shun the wastage of foodstuffs in a world where so many are hungry.

3. The Responsibilities of the More Developed Nations

While each nation has an obligation to develop its basic food supply, those which enjoy a higher level of economic and social development have a special responsibility to help the peoples in underdeveloped regions to develop their own resources. The obligation is the greater because of the frequently destructive impact of the more developed societies upon the social, economic, and religious systems of the less developed societies.

This obligation involves a sharing of scientific, technical, and material resources by both private and governmental agencies. It also requires a sensitivity to the cultural and social values of the recipient countries lest community life be injured, rather than safeguarded and strengthened, by material improvements. Men in underdeveloped regions need more things to live with; but even more they, like other men, need an adequate faith to live by.

COMMISSION OF THE CHURCHES
ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

297 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 10, N. Y., U.S.A.
20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE,
LONDON N.W. 1, ENGLAND

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